

## Hijab and Modesty

### Some points on Hijab

Hijab is one of the obligations set out by God for the good of the human being both in this world and in the Hereafter. We believe that the human being is essentially a soul first, which existed before coming into this world and will exist after leaving it. The body is a sort of shell to house the soul. Perfection and beauty of the soul is gained by traveling towards God on the path He has prescribed.

Hijab could be better understood through the following points.

- 1) First and foremost, it is to gain spirituality and closeness to God through obedience. It is a command of Allah, as attested to in the Quran, hadith, and unanimously agreed on by scholars of Islam. Just as salaah, fasting, etc. are laws that we obey, hijab is also one such law. Hijab is a manifestation of an inner commitment to God. It is good to understand it but that does not mean we reject it if we don't understand it. We cannot pit ourselves against our Creator and assume that we know better than Him what is best for us.
- 2) Hijab is an identity for Muslim women. It declares, without speaking, that the wearer is a God-conscious believer. The decency and virtue it exudes is more powerful than any words that could be used to convey the same.
- 3) Hijab promotes modesty in society. Hijabi women announce, through their hijab, their refusal to be part of a culture that objectifies women and exploits their beauty and sexuality. Modern culture today is replete with examples of the results of such exploitation.
- 4) Islamic sociology invokes the idea of a different private and public sphere in society. Women can relax and be unguarded in the private sphere. But the public sphere with all the different factors in it requires a more guarded entry. Hijab helps in that and protects both the woman and her society.

There is also hijab for men in a different form. Men and women have been created differently, with separate roles to play on earth thus requiring different responsibilities. Both are expected to fulfill their roles while in the world. The soul has no gender and is equal.

Disassociation with hijab often stems from applying secular ways of thinking to religion and spirituality. It can come when some people are trying to carve new identities for themselves and want to distance themselves from their old identities, even when it is based on solid foundations of spiritual submissiveness. There is a tendency to become hostile to symbols of their old identities. It is important to understand that clearly and know the roots of these ideas.

### Some links on hijab

- <https://www.whyislam.org/on-faith/hijab-in-islam-modesty-humility-and-dignity/>
- <https://theplatformproject.ca/understanding-hijab/>
- <https://salehaart.com/blogs/rebuild-your-faith/understanding-the-hijab>

### A Spiritual understanding of Hijab

Although originally meaning a curtain or cover, Hijab has become a term synonymous with the head covering and garment worn by Muslim women. Hijab is a Divine obligation, like the obligation of prayer and fasting. It is a command outlined in the Quran, attested to in the Hadith of the Prophet (s) and the Ma'sumin (a), and unanimously agreed upon by all mainstream scholars of Islam. Verse

24:31 tells believing women to draw their *khimar* over their chests. According to all major Mufasssirin of the Quran - Sunni and Shia alike – this refers to the obligation of covering the head and chest. Allama Tabatabai in al-Mizan says that the word *khimar* refers to the cloth used to cover the head. It should be brought down to cover the chest. Verse 33:59 tells believing women to draw the *Jilbab* over themselves. The *Jilbab* is a loose outer garment. These two verses unequivocally show the dress code required for believing women.

The obligation of Hijab has many reasons behind it. Most people focus on the physical and social reasons behind it. While those are true, there is also a profound spiritual and metaphysical meaning behind the Hijab. Almighty Allah has al-Asmaa al-Husna, beautiful names which comprise of beauty and majesty (Jamal and Jalal). Both the male and the female are seen as two creatures of God, each manifesting certain aspects of His names and qualities. A woman represents the beautiful qualities of Allah, manifesting Divine beauty. The Jamal of the women is balanced with the Jalal of the hijab, a dignity and majesty for the beauty within her. Seyyed Hossein Nasr in his article on the Male and Female Perspective in Islam says that the Absoluteness and Majesty of the Almighty is manifested most directly in the masculine state and His Infinity and Beauty in the feminine state. Islamic spirituality necessitates social patterns, art of dress, and many other ways of life to create the balance of qualities in the genders.

Modesty is an inward quality, but the command is to manifest that modesty outwardly. Islamic sociology invokes the idea of a different private and public sphere in society. Women can relax and be unguarded in the private sphere. But the public sphere with all the different factors in it requires a more guarded entry. Hijab does not restrict freedom to bring feminine potential to fruition. It allows society to become more productive by eliminating or reducing sexual tension between the genders.

There is hijab for men in a different form. Men and women have been created differently, with separate roles to play on earth, thus requiring different responsibilities. Both are expected to fulfill their roles while in the world. The soul has no gender and is equal. God's rules apply to both genders, but in diverse ways. For example, men are also required to cover parts of their body out of modesty, but not in the same way as women. Similarly, men are prohibited from wearing silk clothing and gold ornaments whereas women have no such restrictions. God has ordained different commands for men and women while encouraging both to be modest.

In Islam, the responsibility falls on each gender to protect their own modesty and to control their own desires. Whether a woman dresses modestly or not, it is the obligation of each man to guard his own chastity. While many people may think that hijab is worn primarily to restrain men's illicit desires, this is a misconception. Indeed, it is not the woman's duty to regulate the behavior of men. Men are accountable for their own conduct, they are equally required to be modest and to handle themselves responsibly in every sphere of their lives.

Western society has long seen the hijab with a derogatory perspective. Along with the secularism and individualism that is an integral part of Western society, this has led some to proclaim that hijab is outdated and unnecessary. Such discussions about the obligation of hijab, or the lack of it, have left many people confused. Believing women need to be aware of the truth and discern the false foundations behind the statements. Ultimately It is the choice of the audience who they will accept as an authority on the issue. Who they choose to lead them towards Allah. It is an important choice to make.

## Modesty

### What is Modesty

Modesty means to dress and behave in ways that do not attract inappropriate attention. Modesty or *haya* is a very important quality for a believer. It shows purity of the heart and mind and is a sign of decency, virtue, dignity, and faith.

Modesty stems from God consciousness. It is like a robe that covers the believer, influencing physical, mental and emotional behavior. In the Quran Allah likens *Taqwa* to the best of clothing – *And the dress of Taqwa that is the best* (7:26)

Modesty is not nervousness, wanting to hide, being afraid of someone, or not having confidence. It is not shyness as understood in the social context today. It comes from knowing that God is watching, from feeling ashamed to displease Him and going against His principles. It is a shrinking of the soul from indecent behavior. That type of modesty is a badge of honor as it declares human servitude before God.

Modesty is a natural quality that distinguishes human beings from animals. Rather than follow the instinct unreservedly, modesty demands control and discipline of instincts. The laws of Islam strengthen such modesty in the human being, both for the good of the human being as well as the good of society. Laws such as seeking permission before entering a room (24:58), avoiding indecent deeds (7:33), as well as mandating certain modes of behavior between the genders (24:30-31) all seek to refine and strengthen this natural quality.

### The Holy Quran on Modesty

*Say to the believing men that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts; that is purer for them; indeed Allah is aware of what they do.*

*And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands...*

(Surah an-Nur, 24:30-31)

### Hadith on Haya (modesty)

*There is no faith for one who has no Haya*

Imam Sadiq (a)

Biharul Anwar, Vol. 71, pg 331

*Whenever there is indecency in something it makes it ugly. And whenever there is haya in a thing it makes it beautiful.*

Holy Prophet (s)

Biharul Anwar, Vol. 71, pg 334

*Haya (Modesty) and Faith go together in each era. When one goes, the other follows.*

Imam Baqir (a), Biharul Anwar, Vol. 78, pg 177

*The best clothing in this world is haya.*

Imam Ali (a), Ghurarul Hikam

### Practical Aspects of modesty

It is important to keep in mind the following points when interacting with the opposite gender.

#### **I - Looking**

Our eyes are one of Allah's precious gifts. He has given us guidelines on what we are allowed to look at, and what we are forbidden from looking at.

It is not allowed to look at any non-Mahram (whether it be live or through a live or recorded TV program, or at a photograph) when:

- the look is done out of *Shahwah* (sexual excitement and attraction), or
- there is fear of the look causing *Reebah* (Haram to take place)

It is also not allowed to look at parts of a non-Mahram's body that are commonly covered up (like the chest and upper thighs) when you are watching him in person or as part of a live broadcast

It is okay to look at parts of a non-Mahram's body that are commonly uncovered, such as the hair, face, neck, hands, arms, and legs (as long as there is no *Shahwah* or *Reebah*)

#### **II - Speaking**

Another blessing of Allah is our tongue, which can be a source of remembrance of Allah and spreading goodness to others or a cause for spiritual decline and punishment.

a) When to speak: When talking to non-Mahrams there should be a pure intention and a valid reason. For example,

- Speaking with teachers for the sake of learning.
- Speaking with cousins, or a brother/sister-in-law . . . etc. The person is still not Mahram and cannot be like a brother or sister. But, you may need to speak to them more than others. Such talking should be done keeping in mind the guidelines of modest interaction.
- Talking to classmates in school. It is necessary to interact with them and be polite, respectful, and helpful while still being careful to observe all the guidelines on modesty.

b) Pitch / tone of voice:

- Speak in a normal tone, not making your voice too sweet and high-pitched, or overly friendly.
- Women's voices are by nature softer, so take care to sound more formal or business-like but still cordial.
- Laughing can be very attractive especially when it is done loudly and in a high-pitch. Sometimes however, funny things happen, and we may want to burst into laughter. In these cases, try to laugh without too much sound- it's possible and is actually more elegant! There are hadith that discourage laughing too loudly for both men and women, but it is often more attractive for men when a woman is laughing with high-pitched laughter.
- For females - avoid reciting Qur'an, Du'a, Nasheeds, Latmiyyahs, etc. in a beautiful voice in front of non-Mahrams, unless you are part of a group of girls and your voice is indistinguishable

amidst the chorus.

c) What to say:

- Keep the topic of the conversation to the point
- Avoid joking around
- Avoid discussing your personal life
- Avoid discussing things that would lead to temptation or sin taking place.

Sometimes Shaytaan works gradually to misguide people. Sins that takes place between non-Mahrams often started a long time before with what they thought would be an innocent conversation or chat.

d) Where to converse:

- Don't sit or stand very close to each other
- Avoid being alone with each other

Even if you are not having a conversation, try to avoid being alone with a non-mahram in a place where others do not enter. It is reported that the Prophet (S) said, *"A man should not be alone with a [non-Mahram] female. Whenever that happens, the Shaytan is the third of them."*

Note: According to Islamic law, it is not Haraam for two non Mahrams to be alone as long as there is no fear of falling into sin and no lustful feelings. So, for example, being alone with a non-Mahram in an elevator, as long as these conditions are fulfilled, and there is no concern for safety, is permissible.

All the above guidelines apply to chatting online as well. In fact, chatting online is often more dangerous than talking in person, because when people are online they can disguise themselves more easily and you are never sure what is really going on. Also, people tend to let their guard down when chatting online, and what starts out as innocent banter can easily lead to very inappropriate interaction. Our Maraaji' have specifically stated that social chatting online with non-Mahrams is not permissible because of what it tends to lead to.

### III - Touching

It is not permissible to make skin contact with a non-Mahram, unless there are exceptional circumstances. This includes shaking hands and giving high fives. Making contact through clothing (like shaking hands while wearing gloves) is okay only if there is no *Shahwah* or *Reebah*.

To avoid awkward moments, explain your beliefs from before where possible. If put in the situation handle it with grace by placing your hand on your chest and nodding respectfully. That is a form of greeting in many cultures. At all times, be confident and unapologetic as well as polite. People will respect you for standing up for your beliefs.

### IV - Feelings

Allah has made it possible for us to be attracted to the opposite gender for the purpose of marriage. Sometimes a non-Mahram may seem attractive. There may be something about the person's looks or behavior that seems very appealing.

Initially, having such a feeling of attraction is not Haram because it is out of your control. But it is very important to make the feeling pass out of your heart, to not let it take root in your heart, to not think about it, and to not tell others that you “like” someone or have a “crush” on the person. Instead, limit and control your interaction with the person. Reason with yourself. What good can come out of this relationship? Why should it become a distraction for you, and rob you of precious time and energy? Eventually, the feelings will pass.

If you fill your mind with good and pure thoughts, and you are careful about what you watch, read, and the friends you keep company with, you will find that these types of feelings won’t bother you.

What should be avoided:

- Looking at non-Mahrams (live or through pictures / videos) with the intention of seeing which ones you like or not
- Discussing which non-Mahrams are cute or not with others
- Spreading rumors and gossiping about who likes whom and who has a crush on whom
- Watching shows and movies that encourage thinking of non-Mahrams in this sort of way

### **Overall Guidelines and Etiquette for Interaction with Non-Mahrams**

1. Firstly, we should be clear that there is a difference between Mahrams and non-Mahrams. With non-mahrams, we are respectful, kind, pleasant, friendly and helpful; but our hips should be with other people of our own gender and our Mahrams.
2. Avoid unnecessarily attracting attention to yourself. For example, by being extremely animated, loud, silly or giggly.
3. Don’t bring attention to your body. (Examples include doing exercises in front of non-Mahrams, jumping around, discussing your body etc.)
4. It is always best to keep interactions with non-Mahrams at a professional and business- like manner and to not be taken in by someone who shows you special care and attention. Ask yourself, “What good can possibly come out of allowing this relationship to happen?” There is no point in opening doors to unnecessary trouble. Outside of family, the only type of relationship which is valid between a man and woman is through marriage, which needs to be dealt with in a proper way, not through teasing and “liking” someone.